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ASIA - country statistics

for countries w. more than 45 m. people

Yr	1. Philippines	40% (88.9%)	(Pop. 70 m.)	Xns. 65m.
	2. S. KOREA	30% (29-34%)	(Pop. 45 m.)	Xns 17-18m
	3. Indonesia	12% (10-14)%	(Pop. 182 m.)	Xns 190
	4 Vietnam	8%	(Pop 75m)	Xns 6m.

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ASIA: THE GREATEST CHRISTIAN CHALLENGE
Matthew 9:32-38

My text is Matthew 9:32-38:

" And seeing the multitudes [Jesus] was moved with compassion... and said to his disciples; 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest'."

This text belongs together with the "Great Commission", as a foundational call to worldwide missions. The Great Commission emphasizes obedience, "Go". This verse puts the weight on love, and prayer. "Moved with compassion for the multitudes, Jesus said, "Pray". The Christian mission is motivated by love. It is set in motion by prayer. Then it reaches out to "the multitudes". And that means, Go. Taken together that forms a three-legged stool on which the whole mission of the church must rest: Love, Pray, Go. And since my text begins with Jesus' loving concern for "the multitudes", let me suggest for the next few moments that our greatest missionary challenge is the continent of Asia, for Asia is the continent of multitudes.

Asia is the biggest continent in the world. It has the most people. It is the most diversified continent in the world. Its people are divided in a thousand ways. And it is the most unevangelized continent in the world. There are more people who have not yet been reached by the good news of Jesus Christ in Asia than on any other continent on the earth. Put that together with our text--"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few",-- and I think we really do have the greatest Christian missionary challenge in the world.

I. Asia's first challenge is its sheer SIZE. Jesus' words about the multitudes and the harvest were about people-- people to be brought into the kingdom of God. And Asia, which covers one-third of the land surface of the whole earth, holds 2

billion people (2000 million people). That is 60% of the world's total population. By contrast, North America holds only 6% of the world's people. (60% in Asia; 6% in North America).

And Asia's multitudes are growing faster every year. Take the city of Seoul, the capital of South Korea, as an example. I believe Seoul today is the sixth or seventh largest city in the world. They say it has nearly 12 million people. But when my father arrived in Seoul 106 years ago in 1890, Seoul had only about 150,000 people. In those days there were tigers in the hills around the city; today where tigers roamed, high-rise apartments cover the hills. From 150,000 to 12 million, from tigers to skyscrapers in only two generations, my father's and mine.

All the other continents shrink in comparison to Asia. The second largest country in Asia--is India. It is only the second largest on that vast continent, but India's population, until recently, was larger than the entire population of the two continents of Latin America and Africa combined!

But the most significant statistic about Asia, I think, is one I heard only a few years ago. It's a frightening statistic. In the next 20 years, one billion young Asians will pass through the age of 18. In other words, today's 8-year-old youth in 20 years will be 28 years old, but in those 20 years, another billion young people in Asia will have passed their 18th birthday.

Now that may not sound alarming. But think about it. In the next 20 years one billion young people will enter the most productive period of their lives. To the economist who reported this, it meant that Asia will add another billion young people to the world's most industrially active age group in only 20 years. And one billion people, he said, is about ten times the entire present manufacturing labor force of North America, Western Europe and Japan combined. That means that "manufacturing will go east," he said, and Asia will become the industrial center of the world. N. Macrae, The Economist,

(London), May 7, 1977, p. 42). Already it is coming true. Little South Korea is beginning to outstrip Great Britain and France in industrial production.

That same economist, after noting the staggering economic success of at least parts of Asia, like Japan, Korea and Taiwan, and the enormous potential of China, had a sobering second thought. What will happen to the future of the world if those same one billion Asian youth don't turn into workers as one by one they pass the age of eighteen? Then, he said, we face the terrifying possibility that they will follow what he called, one or the other of the "three modern roads to hell": terrorism, war, or overpopulation. He was not a Christian, and none of those are "hell" in the Biblical sense. But in a way he was right. Terrorism, atomic war, and even overpopulation, all contribute to an overwhelming wave of anxiety sweeping across our troubled world. Suppose, he said, that all those young people turning 18 every year simply become parents at the rate their fathers and mothers did? Then there would be no more room on earth for so many people, and the earth will indeed be like a living hell.

To me, however, the thought of one billion young people in Asia becoming 18 years of age in the next 20 years means much more than what that economist was thinking of. It means that during the next 20 years one billion young Asians will be passing through the most evangelistically reachable years of their lives. A billion young Asians to be reached for Jesus Christ in the years when they might be most open to His call. That is not hell, but a challenge, a part of the greatest challenge that is facing the Church of Jesus Christ today.

When Jesus saw the multitudes, he loved them. That was 2000 years ago, and the fields are still ripe for harvest. More young people in Asia are unreached by the gospel than on any other continent on earth. Korea is called the miracle of modern missions because its churches grow so fast, but there are more non-Christians in Korea today than when my father went out as a pioneer 106 years ago. Jesus sees the multitudes still

unreached, and he says to us, "Don't you love them any more?"

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few".

II. The second challenge is Asia's great DIVERSITY.

Not just its huge size. Asia is first in just about everything. Asia has the driest place on earth--the central desert of Iran. And it has the wettest place on earth--Cherrapunji in Bengal, India, where once 9 meters of rain fell in less than one month. That's not just inches, that is 30 feet of rain in a month. And Asia has the coldest place in the world. It is in Siberia, near Irkutsk, where the temperature falls to 94 F below freezing (C 70 degrees below zero). And it has the hottest place in the world--the Persian Gulf where the summer sun regularly shoots the temperature up to over 122 degrees Fahrenheit (more than 50 C). Asia has the lowest sea--the Dead Sea; and, of course, the highest mountain--Mt. Everest. (J. Herbed, An Introduction to Asia, 1965, p. 23 f.).

But the real challenge lies not so much in the variety of its natural phenomena, but in the diversity of its people, and in the multiplication of its languages. I remember when I was teaching at Nanking Theological Seminary in China. Some of our students had to talk to each other through interpreters, or through writing. They were all Chinese, but they spoke different languages. One of them told me, "We have 50 different languages, we Chinese". But another interrupted him, "No we have 200 different languages". They were both wrong. Counting large and small variations, China has over 1,000 different languages. Asia as a whole has over 3,000 different major spoken languages. What a challenge to cross-cultural evangelism and to Bible translation! There is an urgency facing the Christian world in the twenty-first century which calls even tired and distracted Presbyterians like us to a new vision of world mission. Asia is not just one great continent to be reached. It is 12,500 very different, small or great sub-continent, each with many different cultural or racial groupings within its larger national divisions.

All these divisions present problems. The problem of the languages is only one, but after 2000 years we are still trying to put the Bible into some of the tribal dialects. We need translators. Another is the problem of the different religions. Each is a mighty barrier to the spread of the faith, if we really believe that Christ is, as he clearly said, "the only way"--"No one comes to the Father but by me". Another is the problem of nationalism. Today's national political boundaries between Asia's different countries are more and more becoming walls against the entry of Christian missionaries. Islamic West Asia rejects Christian missions; and Hindu India strictly limits missionary residence. In Japan the old enmity between Korea and Japan still complicates a missionary witness by Korean Christians to the Japanese, or a Japanese Christian witness to Japan. And China, just last month asked South Korea to stop sending missionaries. These Korean Christians, they complained, "even operate under the cover of businessmen or teachers, and actually run churches in some cities which have very powerful Korean communities". (China News and Church Report, Sept. 6, 1996). And we all know that one of the tightest borders in the world against missions is the armed and barbed wire line that separates North from South in divided Korea.

But no armies, no mine fields, no barbed wire can stop the power of prayer. Jesus said, "Love and pray"--even for your enemies. The challenge to us is to make clear to a divided, fighting Asia that the cross makes peace. That is hard to do when Christians too fight each other, and not just in Bosnia.. But it was to a divided church in Asia--Ephesus--that the Apostle Paul wrote, "By the blood of the cross [Christ] made peace... He broke down the middle wall of partition"--those divisions that separate race from race, and class from class. Only the love of Christ can do that. Not a divided church, and not even the church at peace, if it relies on its own power. The power is from the Holy Spirit, the Lord of the Harvest. So pray.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray

therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

III. Asia's third great challenge is church growth. That may not sound like a challenge; it sounds more like a cause for rejoicing, doesn't it. Some of the fastest growing churches in the world are in Asia. Can't we just count our blessings and shout "Hallelujah!", and let those great and growing churches in Asia finish the job? Well, the rejoicing is all right. But there is a problem.

On fact there are two problems, and probably more. On the one hand, it tempts us to skate dangerously close to the sin of self-righteous pride. It can lure those of us who come from Korea, for example, into an almost triumphalist attention to the phenomenal growth of the Korean Church. That is not all wrong. I'm proud that my Father was among the pioneers where the first explosions of massive growth occurred. That was in the north, around the city of Pyengyang, which is now the communist capital of North Korea. He was stoned when he first tried to settle down there. They tried to drive him out. But he lived to see the day when there were so many Christians in Pyengyang that people in the countryside began to call the city "Yerusalem", because they thought a Christian city should be called by the name of the holy city, Jerusalem. It became the largest Presbyterian mission station in the world.

And I am proud of the fact that Eugene and Charlotte Bell gave their lives (she much too soon), to the planting of the Gospel of Jesus Christ farther south and that four generations of their children and grandchildren have faithfully served the Lord in Korea for the last 100 years. I could name every family represented here at our PYFS reunion with pride and tears and gratitude and humility all bound together in thinking of the history of the growth of the Church in Korea.

Where but in Korea will you find churches with more than 25,000 people in attendance on a Sunday morning? The three largest Presbyterian churches in the world are in Seoul, Korea.

The two largest Methodist congregations are in Seoul, Korea. The largest Pentecostal church in the world is in Seoul, Korea. The growth of the Korean churches is one of the great miracles in the history of missions. In China, Indonesia, even in little Nepal, which only 40 years ago was tight closed to Christian missions, the church is spreading across the continent.

But I am convinced that it is precisely where the church is growing fastest that we face a second problem. Some are even beginning to say that the Asian churches are growing so fast, we no longer need to have foreign missionaries. We can just let the churches grow, each in its own country, and that is wrong. Christianity is not a national religion; it is a faith for the world. And the challenge is to take the problem and turn it into an opportunity--to take a growing church, and turn it into a missionary church.

So the large Yongnak Presbyterian Church in downtown Seoul--it sometimes has had a congregation of 60,000 members; it still has 2,000 deacons--it says to its people, "We're large enough. Some of you should hive off like bees and start new churches." And they did. They have some 350 new churches planted all across the world, from Saudi Arabia to New York. Did you know that I could take a draftsman's compass, place its point right on my home in Princeton, New Jersey, draw a circle with a 70-mile radius, and find 700 Korean-American churches within that circle. It helps that both New York City and Philadelphia are within 70 miles of us.

The same challenge that is good for us Korea, is good for us. Our Presbyterian Moderator last year, Marge Carpenter, criss-crossed the country preaching "Mission, mission, mission". Mission, she said, can revitalize our denomination. It takes our minds off ourselves, and reaches out to the world. It transforms selfish love into a love others. It renews our souls. It might even wake up us American Presbyterians and make us begin to grow again.

So don't forget Asia...

Buddha was born in Asia, and there are more Buddhists in Asia than anywhere else in the world.
Confucius was born in Asia and there are more Confucianists in Asia than anywhere else in the world.
Muhammad was born in Asia, and there are Mohammedans in Asia than anywhere else in the world.
So also the Lord Jesus Christ was born in Asia. But are there more Christians in Asia than anywhere else in the world?

No! Not anywhere near. The sad and challenging fact is that Asia is numerically the least Christian continent in the world. Only 7 or 8 Asians out of 100 know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And that, I believe, is the greatest missionary challenge in the world. It is the old, old challenge of Jesus to his disciples: Love, and Pray, and Go.

"Seeing the multitudes, [Jesus] said to his disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest that he will send out laborers to the harvest.'"

And don't forget Asia, where it all began.

-- Samuel Hugh Moffett

Several years ago for the first time, a Korean mountain-climbing team reached the summit of the highest mountain in the world, Mount Everest. When they reached the top, like the few other teams which had managed this dangerous climb, left the national flag of Korea on the highest peak. But then they did something no other team had ever done before. In addition to the national flag, they left a Korean New Testament with the flag, to tell the world that they were Korean Christians.

Like those Korean mountaineers, who carried their testimony to the top of the world, I pray that we may join with the Christians of Korea, with all who believe in the Lord, and send out your message to the mountaintops and to the valleys, to the cities and the smallest villages, that there is salvation only in Jesus Christ.

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Samuel Ling
June 1982

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Korean Ch. characteristics

New York Yung-Soo
Yungwale Pa. 22 - 985 10/14/96

1. No pressure external on church - spontaneous reception.
 2. Church has reached out to all - not just to the elite.
 3. Persecution - under Japanese - Comm. Martyrs.
 4. Renewal and renewal - even small churches (10 members) all have to support ch. + send missionaries.
 5. It is so young, very diligent in learning historical (western) theology and tradition.
-

Tasks

1. Must play a key role in uniting the country.
2. Must play greater contribution to create just soc.
3. Must repay its debt to western missionaries by its own mission.
4. Must find a living theology in its own Korean context.
- 5.

Visited 15 US congregation - will speak of our impression.

For US chh renewal - it must have leaders who are not ashamed of the gospel. So also Korea.

Evil plea - pray for renaissance of Korea.

M I L L E R C H A P E L

The Week Following the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Monday, October 14, 1996

10:00-10:20 a.m.

*The service begins with music of preparation. Please be mindful of those
who are praying.*

ORGAN VOLUNTARY

CALL TO WORSHIP

HYMN #355 (Blue Book) "Hear the good news of salvation" *Nettleton*

SCRIPTURE LESSON Romans 1:13-18

SERMON "One Who Is Indebted"

PRAYER

HYMN #291 (Blue Book) "O God of earth and altar" *Llangloffan*

BENEDICTION

ORGAN VOLUNTARY

Thomas W. Gillespie, President and Professor of New Testament, Liturgist	Shelley Sanders Organist
Young Soo Lim, Senior Pastor, Young Nak Presbyterian Church, Seoul, Korea, Preacher	
Sang Hyun Lee, Kyung-Chik Han Professor of Systematic Theology and Director of the Asian American Program, Translator	

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